

# **Happiness, Life Satisfaction, or Subjective Well-being?**

## **A Measurement and Moral Philosophical Perspective**

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**ABSTRACT.** While not denying the usefulness of different concepts like life satisfaction and subjective well-being, this paper argues that happiness should be preferred in most cases, particularly with respect to what individuals and the society should really be interested in ultimately. Life satisfaction is more liable to a shift in the aspiration level, reducing the comparability of the resulting indices. Life satisfaction and/or preference may also differ from happiness due to a concern for the happiness of others. A moral philosophical argument in favour of happiness as the only rational ultimate objective is given. All proposed qualifications to this principle can be explained by the effects on the happiness in the future or of others (hence really no qualification) or that their apparent acceptability is due to our imperfect rationality. Simple ways to improve the accuracy and interpersonal and intertemporal comparability of happiness measurement include using happiness instead of life satisfaction (or other concepts), pinning down the dividing line of the zero amount of net happiness, using an interpersonally valid unit based on the just perceivable increment of happiness, and the complementary use of this method for small samples and the traditional methods for large samples.

**KEY WORDS:** happiness; life satisfaction; subjective well-being; measurement; interpersonal comparability; moral philosophy.

In the past decade or so, happiness studies have made significant advances, including many new and significant findings, much more interdisciplinary interest (including from economists), and much more attention in the mass media. These are to be welcome. Happiness (for oneself or for others) is the ultimate objective of rational individuals. We make money in order to buy goods; we consume goods to stay alive and to enjoy life; we enjoy life to get happiness; we want happiness for its own sake. It is the ultimate end; it is valuable in itself. It is true that being happy may also make us healthier or may even make us earn more money. However, being healthier and being wealthier are ultimately valuable to us only if they give us more happiness.

Happiness also has an important place in the moral philosophical literature. Despite (or is it because of) centuries of controversy, new concepts of and arguments on happiness are forthcoming. For example, Sumner (1996) advance an authentic (informed and autonomous) happiness theory of well-being that is still hotly debated recently (e.g. Bognar 2010, Tupa 2010, Petersen & Ryberg 2014). However, the concept of happiness used is ‘attitudinal’, and is less misleadingly termed ‘life satisfaction’. Feldman (2004) advances an ‘intrinsic attitudinal hedonism’ theory of the good life. The intrinsic vs. extrinsic distinction (see Blackson 2010 for a discussion) becomes irrelevant if we dispense with the ‘attitudinal’ requirement and go for happiness in the sense of feeling rather than life satisfaction, as argued in this present paper.

The estimation/measurement of happiness in practice is done mainly by survey/interview of the relevant individuals or a sample of them. Somewhat different concepts have been used, roughly falling into three groups: happiness, life satisfaction, and subjective well-being. We are not concerned here with more objective indices such as quality-of-life (QOL) indicators (e.g. Ventegodt 1996). As emphasized by Hajiran (2006, pp.33-4), ‘Improving QOL is just “a means” and not “an end” in itself. The ultimate goal of improving QOL is to maintain and enhance the scope, depth and intensity of human well-being or “happiness”’.<sup>1</sup> While not denying the usefulness of different concepts, this paper argues that ‘happiness’ should be preferred in most cases and particularly with respect to what individuals and the society should really be interested in ultimately. This is related to normative valuation and different persons may have different views. It is difficult if not impossible to have full agreement here. Nevertheless, hopefully some useful views may have been advanced.

Section 1 discusses the meanings of the various concepts and why happiness should be preferred. Section 2 discusses why public policy should aim for happiness. Section 3 discusses how the measurement of happiness could be improved, especially in terms of interpersonal and intertemporal comparability. The lack in comparability in existing happiness measures makes happiness studies vulnerable to the criticism of doubters of happiness results such as Johns & Ormerod (2007; reviewed by Ott 2010). If happiness measures could be based on more

comparable methods of measurement, less controversies and misunderstandings may be forthcoming.

## 1. Happiness, Life Satisfaction, and Subjective Well-being: Meanings and Differences

At any moment in time, an individual may be happy, unhappy, or being neutral (including being unconscious, as during dreamless sleep). Here, being happy or unhappy is interpreted in the wide sense to include not only sensuous pleasures and pains, but also spiritual fulfilment and mental sufferings. All affective feelings that the individual enjoy or suffer from are included. Of course, enjoyment or suffering may have different degrees of intensity. In Figure 1, the degree of intensity is measured in the vertical axis (with higher degree of enjoyment or happiness being further up and away from the origin of neutrality and higher degree of suffering or unhappiness being further down and away from the origin of neutrality) and time is measured on the horizontal axis.

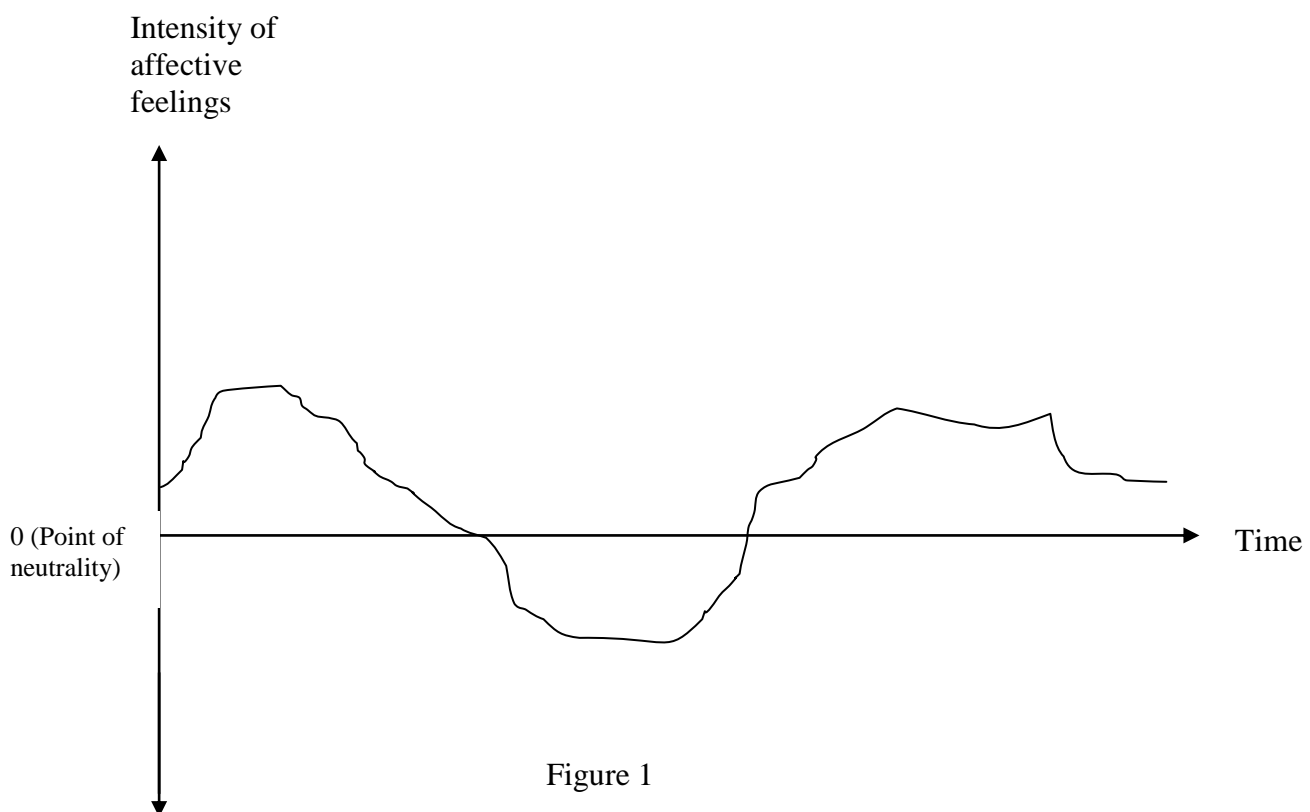


Figure 1

The degrees of positive or negative affective feelings of an individual over a given period of time may be represented by a curve such as the one in Figure 1. Then, the amount of (net) happiness this individual enjoys over this period is given by the areas bounded by this curve above the line of neutrality minus the areas below this line. This is what I view as my happiness (over a given time interval) and I believe that I am representative of most people in this respect. This is also the concept of (objective) happiness preferred by Kahneman (1999) and

sophisticatedly argued for and analysed by Kahneman, Wakker & Sarin (1997).<sup>2</sup> Basically, these authors argue that while the decision utility (representing preference) that guides choices may differ from the experienced utility or happiness, it is the latter that has intrinsic value under a compelling set of axioms. (For the alternative ‘eudaimon’ view requiring virtue per Aristotle, see, e.g. Deci & Ryan 2008 and Gamble & Gärling 2011.)

What about different types of enjoyment or sufferings that may be valued by the individual concerned even when their intensities are the same? To a large extent, Kahneman, Wakker & Sarin (1997) have also answered this question. Here, we may just note the following. Certain types of enjoyment (such as the pleasure of consuming addictive drugs) may cause sufferings in the future (by adversely affecting our health for example) while other types may contribute positively to our health, wealth, and happiness in the future. In the next section, it is argued further that, ultimately speaking, only effects on happiness, including that of others and in the future, are important.

Happiness is the most direct word and most commonly used. The meaning of ‘happiness’ is clear and precise and misunderstanding is minimal. ‘Well-being’ could be taken to be a variety of meanings, including physical well-being or economic well-being. Even if an additional adjective is added to become ‘subjective well-being’, it is still less precise than ‘happiness’.<sup>3</sup> It could still mean either the overall happiness or the more psychiatric sense of being free from mental illness. While ‘life satisfaction’ is also quite comprehensive and clear in meaning, it suffers from the following two fundamental problems, at least at the conceptual level.

Since happiness is the ultimate objective in life, life satisfaction is very closely related to happiness. This is supported by the fact that surveys give very similar results whether happiness or life satisfaction is used. However, life satisfaction may yet differ from happiness. Here, we are not concerned with the practical difficulties both from the researcher side and from the side of the subjects in measuring and in forming judgements regarding happiness and life satisfaction, especially the later. It is well-known that such judgments ‘are constructions drawn on the spot on the basis of currently available information and circumstances, and thus they are highly unstable and sensitive to changes in the context of inquiry’ (Alexandrova 2005, p.303). As summarized by Schwarz & Strack (1999), such reports vary with the order of the questions asked, the time of inquiry, the mood of the subject, etc. This unreliability is probably the main reason why Kahneman (1999) prefers the use of ‘objective’ (a somewhat misleading term since happiness itself is subjective by nature, best understood as ‘objectively measured’) happiness, measured by the temporal integral of moment-based happiness reports. Here, especially for this and the next paragraphs, the practical problems of reporting and measurement inaccuracy are

abstracted away. (For a meta-study of reliability, see Vassar 2008.) Also, Haybron (2007) argue convincingly that ‘our attitudes toward our lives can reflect various virtues and vices, such as gratitude, fortitude, ambition, pride, complacency, smugness, softness, low self-regard, etc.’ (p.107) and are rather arbitrarily affected by the norm and perspective taken. Even in the absence of these difficulties, happiness and life satisfaction in themselves may still differ.<sup>4</sup>

For simplicity, consider a simply hypothetical example of 1,000 individuals. (Like Einstein’s thought experiments, such examples need not be realistic. In fact, deliberate exaggeration from reality is made to drive home the point.) All individuals believe that the only ultimately valuable thing is happiness. However, they are not self-centred and care also for the happiness of other individuals. Thus, they do not just pursue their own happiness but also try to do things that can increase the happiness of others. (Evolutionary biology suggests that we are probably so programmed as our sociability is a trait that increases our fitness for survival and reproduction. In fact, even the gene that gives those who possess it a high in helping others has been found; see Bachner-Melman et al. 2005. This, however, does not negate the importance of upbringing and social influences. On some insights on happiness issues from the evolutionary biological perspective, see Ng 2015.) Then it is hypothetically possible for the following extreme case (exaggerated to emphasize the point) to happen.

Each individual sacrifices much time, effort, and happiness to do something believed to be good for the society. Due to ignorance, unlucky events, etc., their admirable effort does not pay off. They all end up really unhappy (negative affective feelings more than offset positive ones in aggregate) despite some positive feelings of doing something good for the society. If anyone of them is asked how happy they are, each will say fairly unhappy. However, if asked for life satisfaction, each may say reasonably satisfied, because each believe that what she has done for the society makes her life worthwhile. She is so much satisfied with doing something good for the society that this offsets her own unhappiness. This feeling itself is likely to increase her happiness, but not by enough to make the net happiness positive.

For example, suppose that A, one of these individuals, believes that her good work increases the happiness of each and every other individual by 10 (what unit happiness is measured in is irrelevant to the point being made here; the measurability and interpersonal comparability of happiness are discussed in Section 3), giving a total contribution of 9990 to others. This belief increases her net happiness from minus 100 to minus 30. Though she is still unhappy in her own subjective feelings, she thinks that her life is worthy as she has contributed 9990 to the happiness of others. If asked about life satisfaction, she may well say that she is satisfied, though she also says that her happiness is negative. If all the 1,000 individuals are in somewhat similar situations like A, we may get a high degree of life satisfaction and low

happiness. Since happiness is really all these individuals ultimately value, the index of life satisfaction may well be misleading in such cases where the two diverge significantly from each other. In this example, the divergence is partly due to the existence of altruism. Other things being equal, the higher the degree of altruism, the larger is the potential divergence between happiness and life satisfaction.

There is another problem with the concept and measurement of life satisfaction. Though this problem also applies to those of happiness and subjective well-being, the extent of the problem is more serious for life satisfaction. Consider the finding that the average index of life satisfaction for a country such as the U.S. has remained largely unchanged over the last seventy years or so. Can we really be confident that happiness has not increased? Consider a popular method of obtaining the index of life satisfaction. A subject is asked to rate her own index of life satisfaction from the range 0-10, with 0 signifies the least satisfied life and 10 the most satisfied life, taking everything into account. The average index of a country may have remained at say 7. However, it is possible that people fifty years ago were more moderate in their aspiration not only in terms of objective things like income or consumption levels, but also more moderate in terms of subjective happiness. For simplicity, suppose we can use an interpersonal and intertemporal comparable unit of happiness (on which see Section 3 below). Suppose that an average person fifty years ago enjoyed a net happiness level of 700 units and rated herself a life satisfaction index of 7. Now, suppose that an average person enjoys a net happiness level of 1,400 units but still rates herself a life satisfaction index of 7, since her aspired level of happiness is much higher. If so, then an unchanged life satisfaction index may actually hide a doubling in net happiness level. (For some evidence of such a shifting standard and the discussion of related issues, see Hagerty 2003 and Diener & Lucas 2001.)

The above problem may also exist even if the concept of happiness or subjective well-being is used instead, at least for most methods of measurement used currently, including the 0-10 or 0-100 self-anchoring scale. Even if subjects are asked to tick either one of say: very happy, pretty happy, not too happy, and unhappy, the same problem exists. Thus, it may be the case that, people now typically report themselves as 'pretty happy' if their net happiness level is within say the range of 600 to 800 units, while people fifty years ago typically report themselves as 'very happy' for the same range. However, it is likely that, using the concept of life satisfaction makes this problem of changing subjective aspiration more pronounced. This is so because 'satisfaction' is more a concept of relative gratification in relation to the aspiration level. Happiness and subjective well-being are less so, though not completely.

Let me illustrate the point by reporting on the actual situation of a person I know best, myself. Also for simplicity and to isolate the current issue from the previous issue of the effect

of contribution to the happiness of others in affecting one's life satisfaction, let us abstract away any effect on others. If asked to rate my happiness and life satisfaction levels now within the scale of 0-10, I will probably rate both as 9 and tick the box 'very happy'. If I am also asked **now** to rate my happiness and life satisfaction levels **three decades ago**, I will give 6 to happiness level but 8 to life satisfaction. Since I am the same person who experienced my happiness and life satisfaction both now and three decades ago, subject to some imperfection in recollection, I can compare these levels cardinally.<sup>5</sup> Thus, I can confidently say that my (net) happiness level now is at least four times that of three decades ago. I may well be inaccurate in my memory but this does not affect the argument here. A change in the correct multiple to 3 or 6 does not change the point to be made. Taking the mid point 5 to be a level of zero net happiness, putting my net happiness level three decades ago as 6 and the current level as 9 provides a roughly correct reflection of the fourfold difference. While I am also more satisfied with life now than three decades ago, the increase is certainly much less than doubled, not to mention a three or fourfold increase. This difference between the changes in happiness and in life satisfaction is mainly because three decades ago I was also fairly satisfied; not having experienced a much higher level of happiness, I was fairly satisfied with a net happiness level I now describe as 6. The value of 8 is a good description of my level of life satisfaction then compared to the value of 9 now. But this small increase from 8 to 9 in life satisfaction hides the actual larger than three or fourfold increase in happiness.

Though I now put my net happiness level three decades ago as 6 and my level of life satisfaction then as 8, if I were asked three decades ago for reports on the situation at that time, I would probably have reported 8 for both happiness and life satisfaction. I now describe that lower happiness level as 6 only in comparison to my current much higher happiness level. If we normalize the amount of my (net) happiness three decades ago as 100 (in some subjective unit, not out of 10), my happiness amount now is 400. Suppose my happiness level were to decrease back to 100 five years from now in 2020. If someone asks me in 2020, I will probably report my happiness level as 6 and life satisfaction as also 6. Having experienced the high happiness level at 400, the same level of happiness of 100 that would lead me to report a life satisfaction of 8 three decades ago, will in 2020 lead me to report a life satisfaction of only 6. A more important point is this. If my happiness level will be 150 in 2020, I will probably report in 2020 that my happiness level as 6.5 and my life satisfaction level as also 6.5. The crucial comparison now is: Would I prefer:

- X. A life like me three decades ago with a happiness amount of 100 (reported at that time as 8, but reported now as 6) and a life satisfaction of 8; or

- Y. A life like me in 2020 with a happiness amount of 150 (reported as 6.5) and a life satisfaction of 6.5?

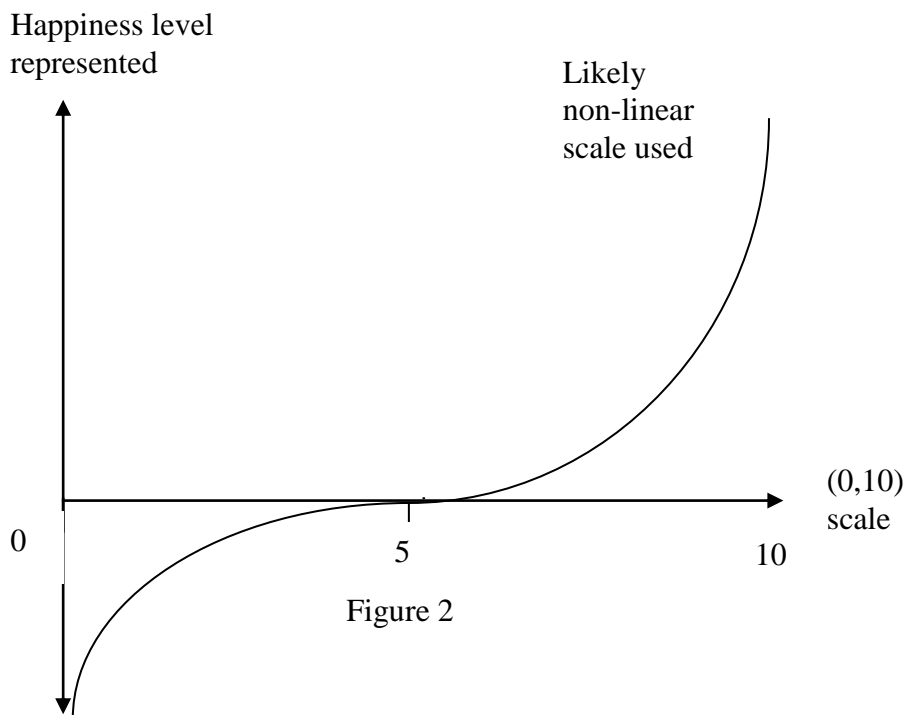
It is absolutely clear to me that I will have not the slightest hesitation in choosing Y, due to its 50% higher amount of happiness (150 over the figure of 100 in X), despite its lower figure of life satisfaction (6.5 in Y vs. 8 in X). It is true that, being less satisfied with life in Y than in X should itself reduce the happiness in Y somewhat. However, this effect should have already been taken into account in the happiness figure of 150 that should be inclusive of all affective feelings, including the happy or unhappy feeling in evaluating the life satisfaction. Happiness is the net sum total of all such affective feelings that are valuable to the individual. Thus, the happiness index is more appropriate than the life satisfaction index. (More on this in the next section.)<sup>6</sup>

In the above example concerning myself, the happiness and life satisfaction indices reported contemporarily are the same (8 and 8 three decades ago; 9 and 9 now; etc). However, cases where the two diverge contemporarily may also be possible. Consider this likely possible though hypothetical example. Consider a fairly happy (amount of happiness = 100) and ambitious young man who reported a happiness level of 7 and life satisfaction of 6 (as his ambition for much higher achievements had far from being realized). Twenty years later, he has experienced much real-life problems and has also come to know many miseries of others, etc. His own happiness amount drops from 100 to 50. He then reports his happiness as 6 but his life satisfaction as 7. His life satisfaction index goes up despite a drop in the actual happiness amount and the reported level because of a much lower level of ambition. The crucial question is: If you have the chance to live only one of these two periods of his life, which one would you want? The earlier one with higher happiness and lower life satisfaction, or the later one with lower happiness but higher life satisfaction? I believe that most people, myself included, will choose the former.

Another problem arises. Suppose my happiness level were to double (not to mention a three or fourfold increase) 5 years from now (when I already report an index of 9). Using the scale of 0-10, I cannot report my happiness as 18. I would probably report 9.5. However, this problem is due to the confinement to the range 0-10, not due to the use of the concept of happiness or life satisfaction. When people are confined to a scale of 0-10 or 0-100, people tend to use the scale somewhat between the normal numerical scale and something like either the logarithmic or the Richter scale (used to measure earthquakes; an increase by one signifies a tenfold increase). While different persons may use the scale to represent different levels of happiness, personally I am inclined to use a scale like the one in Figure 2, where the horizontal axis is the scale between 0-10 and the vertical axis is my cardinal amount of happiness over a



certain period. Such a scale allows the coverage of a larger range of variation of happiness amount and also allows more significant differences over the non-extreme range. If one were to use a normal numerical scale, it will appear as a straight line in Figure one. Then there are an upper and a lower bounds for happiness level beyond which one has to use the same number 10 (for upper) or zero (for lower) even for further variations.



Strictly speaking, the non-linearity in the happiness scale makes the averaging, summation, and multiplication of happiness indices (with life expectancy in particular) of questionable validity. This difficulty can be overcome if a linear scale is used as could be obtained by using the method of happiness measurement based on the number of just perceivable increments as discussed in Section 3. Before such more reliable measures of happiness are used, existing measures may yet be used as the best we have available. Moreover, the use of happiness measures unadjusted for the non-linearity (see Figure 2 and the associated discussion above) may yet serve as a desirable adjustment for those (e.g. Veenhoven & Kalmijn 2005 who propose the measure of 'inequality-adjusted happiness') who wish to take into account of the equality in the distribution of happiness level.<sup>7</sup> Most happiness indices obtained in actual surveys fall between 4 and 8 (for a scale of 0-10). Egalitarian adjustments require counting the same increments of happiness indices at the high end (7-9) as less important than those at the low end (4-6). As may be seen from Figure 2, the needed adjustment to account for the likely non-linearity requires exactly the reverse adjustment. Of course, the two opposite adjustments

may not be exactly offsetting to each other. However, they may be roughly or at least partly offsetting.

By taking psychological happiness in the sense of feeling good instead of life satisfaction or ‘attitudinal’ happiness as of the ultimate value, many controversies in moral philosophy may be resolved; an example is discussed in the appendix.

## **2. Why should the social objective aim at happiness rather than life satisfaction?**

It is not denied that different concepts of subjective well-being may be useful for different purposes. Thus, there is no need to discard all other concepts and concentrate only on happiness. However, this section argues that, as far as the ultimate social objective is concerned, where happiness and life satisfaction (or some other concepts) differ, it is usually happiness that the society should aim to maximize.

Two reasons for life satisfaction to diverge from happiness have been discussed in the previous section. For both divergences, it is clear that happiness should be preferred as the ultimate social objective. The first divergence is due to the possibility that a person A may have low or even negative (net) happiness but yet have high life satisfaction as she believes that she has made significant contributions towards increasing the happiness of others. Whether this belief is correct or not, it can be argued that only her happiness, not her life satisfaction, should be counted in the ultimate social objective. For simplicity, consider only the extreme cases where her belief is either entirely correct or entirely wrong. The intermediate cases are also taken care of by the combination of the arguments for each of the two pure cases.

If A’s belief is incorrect, she did not actually contribute to raising the happiness of other individuals. Her belief that she did so may increase her own happiness. If so, that increased happiness is already counted in the social objective that takes account of her happiness. If A’s belief is correct, she did contribute to raising the happiness of other individuals. The higher happiness levels of other individuals from her contribution are already counted in a social objective function<sup>8</sup> that takes account of the welfare or happiness levels of all individuals. (‘Welfare’ and ‘happiness’ are used interchangeably as a happiness definition of welfare is adopted.)<sup>9</sup> Knowing or believing that her contribution has made other individuals happier probably makes A happier. However, A’s happiness level may remain low, though her life satisfaction level may be fairly high. It should be the low happiness level rather than the high life satisfaction level that should counts towards social welfare. Why? Suppose a person B does volunteer social work that contributes to the happiness of say some elderly people. Obviously, the higher happiness levels of these elderly people count towards social welfare. Moreover, if B himself gets happiness from the social work and/or from knowing/believing that he contributed

to the happiness of these elderly people, his higher happiness level should also be counted in social welfare. Thus, it is not the fact that the happiness of other individuals that A helps to raise has already been included within social welfare that precludes the counting of the higher life satisfaction of A. It is just that happiness should be counted but life satisfaction (at least the part that is not based on happiness but on say pure contribution to others or what may be called non-affective altruism) not; why?

Happiness, either in the form of pleasure of the flesh like eating delicious food or having sex or in the form of spiritual fulfilment, is what the individual directly enjoy and hence is inherently valuable to herself. Each and every individual wants to have a high level of happiness for its own sake. Happiness is valuable in itself. This is self evident to anyone. (If fact, this trait of being able to enjoy and suffer is so important for our survival that individuals completely without this capability are extremely rare, if they have ever existed. Cf. Ng 2015) Thus, we do not need any philosophical arguments to justify this (that happiness is valuable in itself). However, we do have to justify the point that, ultimately speaking, only happiness is valuable and that all other valuable things derive their values ultimately from their contributions to happiness. This is done below.

First, it may be pointed out that arguments on what is good, valuable or ought to be done, etc. belong to the normative sphere.<sup>10</sup> In contrast to the positive sphere where statements/judgments may be either true or false in some objective sense, value judgments can only be persuasive or not. Thus, from Hume's law, it is not logically possible for one to **prove** that only happiness is ultimately valuable or to prove the truth of any other value judgment. I can only try to make my arguments here persuasive. However, recalling the point that different people have different views on such normative issues, I do not expect complete agreement.

I will take readers to see the persuasiveness or even the compellingness of my point in a number of steps.

**Step 1: In an isolated world of no affective sentients, nothing is of any normative significance.**

Here, an isolated world means a world/universe that is completely isolated from any other existence for all time, in the sense not only of having no informational or any other flows between it and others but also of having no any causal connections (including through gravity or any other force) with any other existence. We may conduct our analysis along the line of Einstein's thought experiments; the question of realism is not a relevant issue. One way to imagine this isolated world is to assume that the real world does not exist. That isolated world is the only existence and hence has no informational or any other causal connections with others. If the whole world has no affective sentients from beginning (if there was a beginning) to end

(if there will be an end), it seems clear that nothing is of any normative significance. Here, affective sentients are beings that are capable of enjoying happiness and/or suffering pain/unhappiness. Whether that world is getting warmer or colder, more chaotic or more orderly, etc., nothing will be made better off or worse off. It is of no normative significance.

**Step 2: Other things being equal, it is undesirable to inflict pain/unhappiness; it is desirable/valuable to have happiness.**

If pain/unhappiness is inflicted upon some affective sentient beings without anything desirable, either directly or indirectly, it is clearly undesirable. Similarly, if happiness can be enjoyed without causing anything negative directly or indirectly, it is desirable, as the affective sentient beings (like us humans) can testify to that, at least in principle. This does not rule out the possible desirability of pain/unhappiness that leads to more happiness in the future and/or for others and the possible undesirability of happiness that leads to more unhappiness in the future and/or for others.

**Step 3: If something is of normative significance, it must ultimately speaking be due to some effects on the enjoyment of happiness or the suffering of pain/unhappiness.**

Comparing Steps 1 and 2 above, it can be seen that, if nothing is of any normative significance in a world of no affective sentients, then in a world with normative significance, the normative significance must be due, directly or indirectly, to the affective feelings (happiness and/or unhappiness) of the affective sentients, since this is the only difference between the two cases.

**Step 4: Something that is not in itself happiness or unhappiness but that may affect happiness or unhappiness either directly or indirectly may also be of normative significance.**

If I surreptitiously put a tasteless poison in your coffee, it may have no effect on your enjoyment of that cup of coffee. However, if it makes you seriously sick the next day, it is obviously a bad thing for me to do that, at least if you deserve no punishment and no other benefits come from this. More indirectly, telling a certain lie may in itself cause no or little unhappiness or may even save some embarrassment, but it may have the indirect undesirable effects of reducing marginally the degree of trust between people and even the degree of observance of other basic moral principles in general, and hence may eventually have more negative effects on happiness and is undesirable as a result.

**Step 5: Normative (including moral) principles may be fostered to promote happiness and/or reduce sufferings or to promote things that may be indirectly conducive to happiness.**

Due to the reliance of the human species on sociability (including cooperation in hunting) for survival, we have in-born (naturally selected or God-made) abilities like the capability to learn

languages, the instinct for moral sentiments and outrages, and even the gene for altruism, as already alluded to above. However, as the human species also has a long period of childhood for learning, we also relies much on nurture/education, including learning to observe certain principles such as honesty and refraining from littering. This learning takes place at home, in schools, and through social contacts. Most of us benefits greatly from most people largely observing these principles. Thus the peer and social pressures against non-observance are big.

**Step 6: The adherence of certain outdated normative principles may cause great sufferings.**

As circumstances change, certain previously sensible normative principles may no longer be conducive to happiness and may even cause great sufferings. Just a single example suffices to convince. At least in ancient China, it was regarded as immoral for a woman to marry twice, even after the early death of her husband (while a man must remarry to have offspring and could even have more than one wives simultaneously). The long tradition to continue adhering to this moral principle cause great sufferings and was the theme of much realistic novels. Very slowly but eventually, this principle was given up.<sup>11</sup>

**Step 7: Just like people may adhere to inappropriate normative principles, people, including moral philosophers, may inappropriately believe that certain things are valuable independent of and over and above their contributions to happiness.**

Influenced both by our inborn inclinations (including moral intuitions for equality and justice) and our upbringings, many people (including learned moral philosophers) may mistakenly believe in the normative significance of things other than happiness and the independence of their contributions to happiness. This is a mistake (in the normative sense, being inappropriate, unpersuasive, or even wrong, rather than being false) since it violates Step 3. This may need some elaboration.

Step 3 says that if something is of normative significance, it must ultimately speaking be due to some effects on the enjoyment of happiness or the suffering of pain/unhappiness. These include the effects on future happiness/unhappiness and the effects on the happiness/unhappiness of others, including other individuals and possibly other affective sentiments. When we examine closely normative principles/arguments supposedly based on considerations independent of happiness, we can always find that either they are really related, directly or indirectly, to effects on future happiness or effects on the happiness of others, or that the principles are not acceptable.<sup>12</sup> To consider all such principles/arguments would require a monograph in itself. Here, let us just consider some examples that can be discussed and answered together.<sup>13</sup>

One is the multi-century old argument that it is better to be the unhappy Socrates than a happy pig. A more modern version of this or a similar argument is the so-called pleasure (or experience-machine argument (Nozick 1974); most people prefer their less happy current situations than to be hooked up to pleasure machines that will give them much more machine-induced pleasurable feelings. Another argument is on the common dis-preference for happiness based on falsehood. An example is a happy woman whose husband is disloyal to her. These and similar arguments are apparently very persuasive, making modern utilitarians largely preference utilitarians rather than the classical hedonistic ones. (Classical utilitarianism maximizes the unweighted sum of individual happiness; preference utilitarianism maximizes the unweighted sum of individual utilities which represent individual preferences. Used in the philosophical sense, hedonism only means something referring to the subjective feelings of happiness and does not have the common understanding of selfish indulgence in pleasures to the disregard of duties and/or the interests of others.) The principle of happiness as the only appropriate ultimate objective is defended below against these arguments.<sup>14</sup> (Cf. Haines 2010 defence of hedonism; see also Petersen & Ryberg 2014, and Lampe 2015.)

Consider Mr. C. He believes that, in the presence of uncertainty, the appropriate thing to do is to maximize the expected welfare. (Welfare is used interchangeably with net happiness. For simplicity, consider only choices that do not affect the welfare of other.) Suppose you put C in the privacy of a hotel room with an attractive, young, and willing lady. C can choose to go to bed with her or not to. C knows that the former choice involves a small but not negligible risk of contracting AIDS. He also calculates that the expected welfare of this choice is negative. Nevertheless, he agrees that, provided the lady is beautiful enough and the risk not too high (though high enough to reduce his expected welfare), he will choose to go to bed with her. This choice of C, though irrational (at least from the welfare point of view), is far from atypical. Rather, I am confident that it applies to at least 90% of adult males, the present writer included. Men are genetically programmed to want to make love to attractive (usually implying healthy) women in their reproductive ages who have not yet conceived (simultaneously explaining why slimness in waist and young girls are attractive), since this helps them to pass on their genes.

After the evolution of consciousness to help making choices (like fight or flight) on the spot by sizing up the situation, evolution (or God) makes sure that consciousness-guided choices are consistent with fitness (for survival and reproduction) by also endowing conscious species with affective feelings. So, activities consistent with fitness (like eating nutritious food when hungry and having sex with reproductive members of the opposite) are rewarded with pleasures and fitness-reducing activities (like injuries to the body) are penalized with pain. Thus, fitness-consistent choices are usually also welfare-maximizing choices. However, since the

ultimate decisive factor is fitness, the coincidence is not 100% (Ng 1995). In particular, programming the organism to be excessively (from the viewpoint of welfare maximization) in fear of death or to be excessively inclined to mate may be fitness-maximizing. This explains why a man like Mr. C above will likely choose to have sex with the attractive girl even if he knows that this reduces his expected welfare. This example suggests that the choice or preference of a person may not be a perfect guide to what should ultimately be valuable to her.

Should our ultimate objective be happiness or should it be our preference? Preference may diverge from happiness or welfare for three reasons: a concern for the welfare of others (possibly including animals), ignorance, and irrationality (or imperfect rationality). These three factors are exhaustive as 'irrational preference' is defined to be the preference against one's own welfare due neither to ignorance nor a concern for the welfare of others. Obviously, if the divergence is due to ignorance, happiness should prevail over preference. If due to a concern for the welfare of others, a distinction should be made between the individual and the society. It is admirable for an individual to sacrifice her own happiness for the welfare of others. However, for the society, the social objective should take account of the welfare of all individuals. (For simplicity, we ignore animal welfare here.) If the divergence is due to irrational preference, it is also clear that happiness should prevail, since preferences based on irrationality are similar to those based on ignorance. For the case of this divergence due to the genetically programmed tendency to mate, it may be pointed out that our (i.e. persons like you and me) welfare is the affective feelings that we enjoy over our life time, not that of our genes that 'aim' at fitness. We should aim at happiness, not fitness. (The maximization of long-term welfare requires sufficiently high fitness though.) We are the feeling persons, not the unfeeling genes. Thus, Mr. C, in his calm and reflective moment, may agree that it is in his interest to resist going to bed with the attractive lady to avoid contracting AIDS. However, due to biology, few men can resist successfully in that hotel room. However, for the ultimate social objective, we should go with his reflective moment rather the moment he was tempted by the attractive lady in the hotel room; we should go with our feeling persons, not with the unfeeling genes.

Just as we are born with the excessive inclination to mate, we are also genetically programmed with certain traits that tend to increase our fitness even if our happiness may be compromised somewhat, perhaps at the margin. One such trait is our inclination to do things rather than just enjoying existing accomplishments or just enjoy the stimulation of a pleasure machine. The drive to achieve helps us to increase our fitness. This drive is also much reinforced by education and social influences. We find such drives so natural and so important that we do not know that, when such drives conflict with our happiness, they (usually only at the margin, as too low a drive level is bad both for fitness and for welfare) are really bad for our

true interest, just like the excessive drive to mate in the case of Mr. C in his hotel room. Thus, while it may be true that most persons will reject the pleasure machine option offering many times the amount of happy feelings, the choice of this option (assuming no external costs on others) is the more rational one, just like the choice of not sleeping with the lady. Will I choose the pleasure machine option? Still not, because I believe that I can contribute to the welfare of others through my work. If I cannot and if hooking up to the machine will not put anyone in misery, I will in fact gladly choose to hook up!<sup>15</sup> Similarly, I prefer to be a happy pig rather than be a learned philosopher if my philosophy cannot help others, directly or indirectly, to increase happiness by a lot more. My choice may be the exception. However, as explained above, most people (the present author included) are not perfectly rational due to our genetic programs and our upbringing.

We are similarly programmed and socially influenced to be curious and want to find the truth and so on. Thus, our preference for 'authentic happiness' or dis-preference for a happy but deluded life may again be explained by either the effects on the happiness in the future or of others, or by our imperfectly rational preferences. For the ultimate social objective, we should go with the rational objective of happiness rather than the imperfectly rational preferences. In fact, it may be argued that it is a mistake for failing to see that happiness is the only rational ultimate objective and all supposed qualifications to this can be explained by the effects on the happiness in the future or of others (hence really no qualification) or that their apparent acceptability is due to our imperfectly rational preferences programmed by our genes and shaped by our upbringings and social interactions. If moral philosophers can see this fundamental point in ethics, they would probably have no difficulties in accepting happiness as the only right ultimate moral principle. However, it may be in their interest not to accept this simple truth as it would make most papers in moral philosophy not worth publishing.

This does not deny the value of secondary virtues like truth, autonomy, accomplishment, justice, etc. However, it is important to keep in mind that all these virtues are ultimately based on the effects on happiness. Failure to do so may end up causing great suffering such as the case of blindly adhering to the moral principle of not permitting women to marry twice in ancient China touched on above. Injustice is the denial of due happiness or the undue imposition of unhappiness. Why certain denial is or is not due denial or undue imposition is ultimately also based on the effects on happiness. However, once secondary virtues/principles are accepted, their violation may be detrimental to happiness not only due to the direct effects but also due to indirect effects, including reducing the general adherence to good moral principles and making those believing in the principles less happy. Viewing happiness as



ultimately the only thing of value does not preclude taking all these direct and indirect effects into account.

Griffin (2007, p.147) asks, ‘What could be the bridging notion that would allow us to compare a short life of supreme moral achievement with a long ordinary life?’ A short life of supreme moral achievement (safeguarding the country in Griffin’s example) may be more valuable, but only because it helps others to achieve more happiness, both directly in safeguarding the country and in setting a good example for virtuous and courageous acts. Accepting happiness as the only ultimately valuable thing allow us (subject to practical difficulties of estimating the quantitative effects) to compare different secondary values and to make the logical choice when different secondary principles are in conflict.<sup>16</sup>

Most objections to happiness as the only ultimate value ignore the effects on others and in the future. For example, consider Hausman’s (2010, p.336) objection: ‘A crucial problem with the proposal to diminish the time people spend doing things they find unpleasant is that a myopic policy of maximizing current net pleasure is no more likely to maximize net pleasure over a lifetime than is a policy of maximizing weekly profits likely to maximize profits over a decade.’ Obviously, if adequate effects on the future and on others are taken into account, maximizing (net) happiness is not open to such objections.

The above argues in favour of happiness against preference (as the ultimate objective). However, the difference between happiness and life satisfaction and that between happiness and preference are very similar. Thus, our argument in favour of happiness against preference can also be used to argue in favour of happiness against life satisfaction where the two differ.

### **3. How could the measurement of happiness be improved?**

There are a number of methods to improve the measurement of happiness to increase its accuracy and comparability, including interpersonal and intertemporal comparability. Some of these methods are easier to implement than others. Let us start from the easier ones first.

First, as discussed in the previous two sections, as a rule, using the concept of happiness instead of other concepts like life satisfaction is likely to yield a better result. This is easily implemented.

Secondly, asking subjects to tick from: very happy, pretty happy, not too happy, and unhappy gives very vague results. This is so because phrase like ‘not too happy’ is vague as to the amount of happiness it represents. It may either represent a positive amount of (net) happiness or a negative amount. Before we use some interpersonal comparable units of happiness measurement (which is more complex, as discussed below), it is difficult to get

happiness results that are valid across persons. Different persons may use the same phrase such as 'very happy' to describe different amounts of happiness, and use different phrases to describe the same amount of happiness, making interpersonal comparison difficult. However, there is a well defined level of happiness that has interpersonal significance. This is the level of zero (net) happiness, or where the amount of positive happiness is just offset by the negative amount of happiness or the amount of unhappiness (pain and sufferings). In terms of Figure 1 above, it is the case where the area above the line of neutrality equals that below this line. If the net amount of happiness is zero, the value of life to that person herself (i.e. ignoring any effects on others) is neutral. This has an interpersonal significance. A person may have a large amount of positive happiness and also a large amount of unhappiness. Another person may have a small amount of positive happiness and also a small amount of unhappiness. It may be difficult to compare the amount of happiness (or unhappiness) of the first person with that of the second. However, if the amount of positive happiness of each of these two persons just offsets the amount of unhappiness, the net amounts of happiness of both persons are the same, being both equal to zero. Thus, happiness studies should aim to discover, among others, information regarding the proportions of people with happiness levels above, at and below this level of neutrality. This is an interpersonally, intertemporally, internationally, and inter-culturally comparable and useful piece of information.

When a subject is asked to rate her own happiness within the scale of say 0-10, it is true that most people may use the mid point of 5 to stand for the point of neutrality. However, this is by no means certain or universal. Thus, a brief instruction asking the subject to use 5 to stand for neutrality will increase the informational content of the survey results especially with respect to the comparability of the proportion of people above the neutrality point.

The above improvement can be easily implemented. However, while achieving a significant improvement easily, it does not solve most of the problems of comparability. Society A may have 90% of people above the line of neutrality while society B only has 85%. However, society B may still be a happier one if many of those above neutrality have much higher happiness than society A and most of those below neutrality in society B are only marginally below while most of those below neutrality in society A are significantly below.

To overcome such difficulty of incomparability, Ng (1996) develops a method that yields happiness measures that are comparable interpersonally, inter-temporally, and interculturality. It is based on Edgeworth's concept of a just perceptible increment of happiness, but developed to be operational and actually used to conduct an actual survey/measurement.<sup>17</sup> For example, if you prefer two spoons of sugar in a given cup of coffee to 1.5 spoons, you may not know the difference between 2 and 1.99 spoons. There exists a difference that makes one just perceivably

taste better than the other. (Where the time dimension is considered, we may have to use a just perceivable increment over a just perceivable unit of time.)

Edgeworth took it as axiomatic, or, in his words ‘a first principle incapable of proof’, that the ‘minimum sensible’ or the just perceivable increments of pleasures for all persons, are equatable (Edgeworth, 1881, pp. 7ff., pp. 60 ff.). Ng (1975) derived this result as well as the utilitarian social welfare function (SWF), that social welfare is the unweighted sum of individual utilities/welfares, from more basic axioms.

The main axiom is the **Weak Majority Preference Criterion (WMP)**: *For any two alternatives  $x$  and  $y$ , if no individual prefers  $y$  to  $x$ , and (1) if  $I$ , the number of individuals, is even, at least  $I/2$  individuals prefer  $x$  to  $y$ ; (2) if  $I$  is odd, at least  $(I-1)/2$  individuals prefer  $x$  to  $y$  and at least another individual's utility level is not lower in  $x$  than in  $y$ , then social welfare is higher in  $x$  than in  $y$ .*

The reason why WMP leads us to the utilitarian SWF is not difficult to see. The criterion WMP requires that individual utility/welfare differences sufficient to give rise to preferences of half of the population must be regarded as socially more significant than utility differences not sufficient to give rise to preferences (or dispreferences) of another half. Since any group of individuals comprising 50 per cent of the population is an acceptable half, this effectively makes a just-perceivable increment of utility/welfare of any individual an interpersonally comparable unit.<sup>18</sup> (Ignoring the difference between individual preferences and welfare, utility which represents preference, and welfare may be used interchangeably. Where they differ, welfare or happiness should be used, as argued in the last section; WMP should then be revised to refer to happiness.) The compellingness of this argument is expounded in Ng & Singer (1981).

Thus, measures of happiness based on the concept just perceivable increment of happiness is not only cardinal but also interpersonally comparable. If we use the same number say one to measure the happiness difference of a just perceivable increment for all individuals, the happiness indices so constructed are interpersonally comparable since each just perceivable increment of happiness is equitable across individuals. Though such measures are more difficult to obtain, some such measures may be obtained for some small but representative samples and the results compared with the existing measures taken on larger samples. If some reliable correspondences between the two sets of measures could be established, we may not have to use the more complicated method for the majority of subjects surveyed. The combined use of these two methods may be a good way to tackle the problems of reliability and comparability.

The study of happiness is still a very new science. Thus, it has much scope to be improved to increase the accuracy and comparability of happiness measures not only by taking account of

the above but also many other issues. Given time and more studies, significant improvements may be expected.

#### **4. Concluding Summary**

The main points of this paper include:

- The (net) happiness (or welfare) of an individual is the excess of her positive affective feelings over negative ones.
- Life satisfaction is likely to be more liable to be affected by shifts in the aspiration level, reducing the comparability of the resulting indices.
- Life satisfaction and/or preference may differ from happiness due to a positive valuation on the contribution to or a concern for the happiness of others.
- As happiness is directly experienced by the individual as valuable, its normative value needs no additional justification.
- Things like institutions and moral principles may be used to promote happiness directly and indirectly. In time, they may be mistakenly valued for their own sake, while ultimately their values should be based on their contribution to happiness.
- We are born, brought up, and socially influenced to have certain preferences which are largely consistent with our own happiness. Where they diverge, than apart from the effects on the happiness in the future and of others (hence really no divergence in the longer/wider perspective of happiness), ultimately it is happiness that is really consistent with rationality.
- Simple ways to improve the accuracy and interpersonal and intertemporal comparability of happiness measurement include using happiness instead of life satisfaction (or other concepts), pinning down the dividing line of the zero amount of net happiness, using an interpersonally valid unit based on the just perceivable increment of happiness, and the complementary use of this method for small samples and the traditional methods for large samples.

### **Appendix**

#### **Resolving Some Moral Philosophical Controversies**

By taking psychological happiness in the sense of feeling good instead of life satisfaction or ‘attitudinal’ happiness as of the ultimate value, many controversies in moral philosophy may be resolved. Just consider one example to illustrate the point here. Feldman (2004) advances an ‘intrinsic attitudinal hedonism’ theory of the good life. Due to taking the attitudinal happiness or rather life satisfaction as the focus, Feldman finds that the extrinsic satisfaction has to be excluded.

“When a person takes attitudinal pleasure in some state of affairs, he may take this pleasure in the state of affairs because he thinks it is related to some other state of affairs, and he takes pleasure in that other state of affairs. The most familiar instance of this sort of thing is the instrumental case. I take pleasure in the fact that the waiter is heading for our table. Why? Because I think he is bringing beer and peanuts, and I take pleasure in the fact that I soon will be enjoying them. ... In cases like this, the person takes attitudinal pleasure in one state of affairs in virtue of the fact that he takes pleasure in others. In such cases, I say that the person is taking ‘extrinsic attitudinal pleasure’.” (Feldman 2004, p.63).

According to Feldman, only the intrinsic attitudinal pleasure of enjoying bear and peanuts is to be included, not the extrinsic one of anticipating the enjoyment. The intrinsic vs. extrinsic distinction (see Blackson 2010 for a discussion) becomes irrelevant if we dispense with the ‘attitudinal’ requirement and go for happiness in the sense of feeling rather than life satisfaction. If the person also feels good when anticipating the enjoyment before actually eating, that pleasurable feeling is also a part of his subjective happiness. All actual positive feelings are to be counted positively and all negative feelings negatively, whether extrinsic or intrinsic in Feldman’s sense.

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## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Cf. Lavalley et al. (2007) on the contentment with life assessment scale which is closer to life satisfaction than QOL. This paper is also not concerned with many possible other concepts of interest, e.g. self-actualization (Maslow 1973) and the sense of coherence (Antonovsky 1996) that are important in themselves and related to but different from happiness.



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<sup>2</sup> For discussions of the various concepts of happiness, see, e.g. Veenhoven (1984, 2000), Kim-Prieto, et al. (2005), Brülde (2007a), Haybron (2007). The concept I use is what philosophers called the hedonistic theory or what Haybron (2000) calls ‘psychological happiness’. This is distinct from ‘prudential happiness’ and differs from the concept of happiness as life satisfaction itself or something similar, e.g. ‘happiness as involving the realizing of global desires, a life plan, requires a level of rationality to develop’ (Chekola 2007, p.67). It is a pure affective view, a mental-state concept, and internalist. Using ‘happiness’ in this sense is most consistent with the common usage of the term. For a recent anthology on the various concepts of happiness, see Mulnix & Mulnix (2015).

<sup>3</sup> See Diener & Scollon (2003) on the concept of subjective well-being.

<sup>4</sup> Thus our argument here resonates with Haybron’s point that ‘Life satisfaction is inherently ill-suited to serve as a proxy for well-being’ (p.113). Certain peoples, like the Australian aborigines, may be easier satisfied with life for any given level of happiness; see Biddle (2014).

<sup>5</sup> Seidlitz & Diener (1993) found that memory deteriorated proportionally for both positive and negative events over a one-year interval. Assuming that this is true for longer period, my current judgments of past happiness may be quite reliable. See, however, Hagerty (2003) on some difficulties of intertemporal judgments of happiness and life satisfaction.

<sup>6</sup> While recognizing that a host of factors affect life satisfaction, if we abstract away factors like contributions and achievements, and concentrate on factors emphasized in the last three paragraphs, life satisfaction may largely be an increasing function of current happiness, the relative amount of current happiness to the aspiration level, and the change in happiness, i.e.  $LS = F(H, H/H^e, \Delta H/H)$ , where  $H^e$  is the aspiration level of happiness and  $\Delta H$  is the change in happiness (from the previous level). A specific function is  $LS = 5 + \frac{1}{2} \log(H/H^e) + \frac{1}{2} \log |\Delta H/H|$ , where the figure 5 is to represent the level of neutrality out of the range 0-10, and the last term on the log of the absolute value of  $\Delta H/H$  is to be added if  $\Delta H$  is positive and to be subtracted if negative. If we operate with figures of  $H$  within hundreds or thousands and ratios that are not extreme, this function gives reasonable values within the range 0-10.

<sup>7</sup> Personally, I do not believe in the relevance of equality in the ultimate objective. Inequality in income is undesirable both because of the diminishing marginal utility/welfare of income and because of the indirect undesirable effects of inequality in reducing happiness through for example reducing social cohesion. Since happiness is already the ultimate objective, we can neither have diminishing marginal happiness of happiness nor further indirect effects, except in an intertemporal framework where the happiness in the future has not yet been accounted for. Either accounting for this intertemporal effect or ignoring it, an objective function that is not linear in individual happiness can be shown to violate some compelling axiom, i.e. treating a perceivable increment of happiness as less important than a not perceivable one; see Ng 1984. Moreover, the argument for the utilitarian social welfare function (Ng 2000, ch.5) supports not taking into account inequality in the ultimate objective. (These are briefly discussed in Section 3.) Also, Ott (2005) shows that higher average happiness tends to go with higher equality in happiness.

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<sup>8</sup> Any Paretian social welfare (or objective) function is increasing in individual welfare levels. A utilitarian social welfare function sums all individual welfare levels with equal weights. For an argument in favour of a utilitarian social welfare function, see Ng (1990, 2000, ch.5).

<sup>9</sup> Welfare has been used in a variety of senses. Here, only the happiness concept of welfare is used. Even for those who regard welfare as happiness, usually welfare is used to denote longer term happiness. However, either holding the time period concerned the same or taking account of relevant effects in the future, we may use welfare and happiness interchangeably.

<sup>10</sup> I use the term ‘normative’ in its wider sense, being in contrast to ‘positive’ and inclusive of elements of ‘evaluative’ and ‘prescriptive’.

<sup>11</sup> In fact, I am prepared to go further than Step 6 in arguing that some current moral principles and legal prohibitions may also cause great suffering. For example the current very strict law against euthanasia under virtually all circumstances in most countries, though serving as a safeguard against potential murders in the name of euthanasia, is almost certainly excessively restrictive at the margin. While some safeguards are needed, a blanket prohibition of euthanasia causes much unnecessary suffering. However, the case against the moral prohibition of remarriage of women is now universally accepted while the case against blanket prohibition of euthanasia may still be controversial. Since Step 6 as it stands is already sufficient for my argument in the text, it is not necessary to strengthen it to a stronger Step 6’.

<sup>12</sup> Thus, Mill’s distinction of happiness of higher and lower quality is either reducible to quantities of happiness when the indirect effects on others and in the future are taken into account, or not really acceptable.

<sup>13</sup> For these and similar arguments, see, e.g. Elster (1983), Sen (1987), Sumner (1996), Jost & Shiner (2002), Brülde (2007b), Chekola (2007). In contrast, Silverstein (2000), Feldman (2004), Tännsjö (2007), Crisp (2006), Haines (2010) defend hedonism. See also Petersen & Ryberg (2014), Lampe (2015).

<sup>14</sup> For hedonistic utilitarianism, one needs the additional unweighted sum of utility/happiness part not discussed in this section. It is touched on in the next section and fully argued for in Ng (2000, ch.5).

<sup>15</sup> The amount of happiness from the pleasure machine has to be very, very large for it to be worthwhile for all individuals to hook up if that means no further advance in knowledge, science, and technology which may help to increase the happiness of our grandchildren very spectacularly.

<sup>16</sup> Our pure happiness theory also avoids many asymmetrical positions difficult to sustain. For example, among others, Brülde (2007b) argue against the pure happiness theory based, in my view, either on effects on others or the future or on some unacceptable grounds. However, he concludes, ‘The pure (unmodified) happiness theory is not a plausible theory of the good life, but it may well be a plausible theory of the bad life’ (p.47). Such asymmetries are difficult to justify. If a happy life may not be good due either to the detrimental effects on others and the future (which I accept as a valid reason but not inconsistent with the pure happiness theory) or to the violation of some principles/virtues not based on

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happiness (which I reject), then it seems that we should also symmetrically have the result that a miserable life may not be bad due to the favourable effects on the happiness of others and/or the future or due to the observance of some principles/virtues not based on happiness.

<sup>17</sup> The concept of using the faintest unit of pleasure as the unit of measurement may be traced back to Bentham; see Tännsjö (1998).

<sup>18</sup> Given continuity, if we do not equate a just-perceptible increment of utility/welfare of any individual with that of any other individual, then we count the perceptible increment of one person as less important than the imperceptible increment of another and this violates WMP and is also clearly unacceptable.